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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000385

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [IS](#) [PBTS](#) [KWBG](#)  
SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY ORDERS DEMOLITION OF 55  
RESIDENTIAL UNITS; CONSUL GENERAL EXPRESSES CONCERN TO MAYOR

REF: A. JERUSALEM 249  
[B](#). JERUSALEM 319  
[C](#). JERUSALEM 337

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Jerusalem Municipality issued demolition orders on March 3 for 55 apartments located in five buildings in the Ras Khamis area of East Jerusalem, stating that the buildings were constructed without a permit. The Consul General called Jerusalem Mayor Barkat on March 4 to express concern about these and other pending demolitions, and to urge the Mayor to suspend them. Mayor Barkat called the demolition orders "an internal Israeli affair" and equated the demolitions to "upholding the law." The PA strongly condemned the demolition orders, pointing to them as evidence that the GOI "does not want peace." Several prominent Palestinians called the orders "ethnic cleansing." Lawyers of the 55 apartments' residents obtained from the district court injunction orders on March 5 freezing the demolition orders until March 10. End summary.

#### Demolition Orders for 55 Apartments in Ras Khamis

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[1](#)2. (C) Mayor Barkat's Deputy Political Advisor Elad Halevy confirmed to Poloff on March 5 that the Municipality issued administrative demolition orders on March 3 for five apartment buildings, comprising 55 apartments, in the Ras Khamis area of East Jerusalem. Halevy said the buildings were constructed without a permit, and that the Municipality issued a stop work order several months ago, during the early stages of construction, which the builders ignored. According to Halevy, the Ras Khamis buildings were unoccupied when the decision was made to demolish them. He added that "only 50 square meters out of five 2000-square-meter buildings are occupied." Halevy claimed Palestinian families moved into the building solely to create "facts on the ground" and put up legal obstacles to demolition.

#### Consul General Calls Mayor Barkat

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[1](#)3. (C) The Consul General called Mayor Barkat on March 4 to express concern about the demolitions. The Consul General noted Secretary Clinton's public comments earlier in the day calling the demolitions "unhelpful" and "not in keeping with the obligation entered into under the Roadmap." Barkat said the five Ras Khamis buildings were built illegally and that he must enforce the law equally in east and west Jerusalem. Barkat said he signed the Ras Khamis orders two weeks before they were announced.

[1](#)4. (C) When the Consul General asked if there was a town plan that would allow Palestinians to obtain permits at that location, Barkat said no, but that he wants to use the land

in question for a school for Palestinians. The Consul General emphasized that home demolitions in East Jerusalem have political ramifications and complicate U.S. efforts to promote peace. Barkat replied that he has to uphold the law with regard to illegal construction. The Consul General urged that the Municipality refrain from demolishing homes until there are town plans in place that allocate land in a rational way, in keeping with the needs of the residents.

15. (C) Mayor Barkat told Israeli press on March 4 that home demolitions in East Jerusalem are "an internal Israeli legal matter unrelated to the political sphere." His office issued a public statement announcing that "a cynical disinformation campaign took place surrounding the visit of Secretary Clinton and the start of the Obama Administration." The statement goes on to say, "the area of illegal construction includes land reserved for public schools and institutions for the benefit of the residents," and "according to the Municipality's obligation to the residents, the Municipality must stop the construction."

#### Palestinian Reaction

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16. (SBU) During his March 4 press conference with the Secretary, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said the PA "completely rejects" the East Jerusalem demolition orders in both Silwan and Ras Khamis, calling them "clear signals" that the GOI "does not want peace." Several prominent Palestinian political and religious figures, including Fatah-affiliated PLC member Jihad Abu Zneid and Waqf Director Azzam al-Khatib, characterized the demolition orders as part of an Israeli

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policy of "ethnic cleansing" against Palestinians in East Jerusalem, aimed at "displacing the indigenous residents of Jerusalem."

#### PA to Finance Legal Challenge to Demolition Orders

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17. (C) Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's advisor on Jerusalem Affairs, Hatem Abdul Qader, told Polspec on March 5 that lawyers of the Palestinian residents of the Ras Khamis buildings obtained from the district court injunction orders freezing the demolition orders until March 10. Abdul Qader said the Prime Minister's office pledged to finance private legal action challenging the Jerusalem demolition orders. The district court, according to Abdul Qader, is one level above the Jerusalem municipal court that issued the demolition orders, and the PA plans to take the case up to the Israeli High Court, and anticipates a lengthy court battle. Abdul Qader said half of the 55 apartments in Ras Khamis were recently "readied for occupancy," and rest would be ready soon.

WALLES